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King Death Costly to Taxpayers

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Special to The Journal-Constitution

NASHVILLE — Memphis memorialized Dr. Martin Luther King's death, April 4, ten years ago, with parades and church services for the assassinated black leader, but the Tennessee taxpayers generally bemoaned the fact that King's death had been by far the most expensive crime ever committed in the state.

Dr. King's assassination may have paled in some quarters but it has never ceased to be a thorn in the side of Tennessee officialdom and the Tennessee taxpayer.

From the firing of the shot that fatally wounded Dr. King on April 3, 1968, the pursuit of the killer became one of the most costly items such an investigation ever instigated. The capture of James Earl Ray in London and his return to Memphis was the highest price ever paid by taxpayers for a fugitive. His incarceration in Memphis jails until his trial added to the soaring costs. His plea of guilty brought him a life sentence instead of the death penalty, which was legal then in the state.

Since that time Ray has hired and fired attorneys right and left and filed suit after suit going all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court.

He has attempted to escape several times but was unsuccessful until he fled Brushy Mountain prison for about two days. In the wilderness of the mountains, blood hounds hunted him down.

He has been confined in solitary but has sued to be released into the general prison population. He has sued against transfer to Brushy Mountain prison, and against his treatment under various conditions.

Almost constantly, he seeks a new trial, claiming he was pressured into confessing and pleading guilty. He has lost in state and federal courts repeatedly.

His 99-year term has been extended for his escape from Bushy Mountain despite his claim he escaped because he was serving as an innocent man. He now has produced a picture which he identifies as the Raoul w. paid him to buy the rifle and conspire to kill King.

His latest lawyer, Mark Lane, who is pressing the inquiries into the Kennedy and King assassinations, now contends that the FBI is suspect in the conspiracy against King. He has the latest photograph which Ray says is that of the mysterious Raoul, whom he has never really identified.

Thousands marched in Memphis on April 4 to memorialize King's death. The march passed the Lorraine Motel where King was shot, and where his room is a permanent memorial to his memory.

The state will some day get around to figuring how many millions James Earl Ray has cost the taxpayers, but as of now, nobody argues that a record has been set.

Briefs

Gov. Ray Blanton now has said he will sign the highly controversial anti-

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King Case Figure to Be Freed

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (UPI) — A possible witness in the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. will soon be released from a mental hospital she was committed to three months after King's death.

But publicity may keep the witness, 62-year-old Grace Walden, from having a place to live when she is released, authorities said Wednesday.

Mrs. Walden has said she saw a man running down a boarding house hallway only seconds after King was struck by a fatal rifle shot. The boarding house is across Mulberry street from the Lorraine Motel, where King was killed.

She told a Memphis television station, WREG-TV, that James Earl Ray is not the man she saw April 4, 1968. Ray is serving a 99-year sentence on a guilty plea for King's murder.

"They have the wrong man," she said. "It was not Ray."

A group of religious leaders from around the country called Tuesday — the 10th anniversary of King's death — for a new investigation of the assassination. The group also said Mrs. Walden should be released.

Dr. Morris Cohen, superintendent of Western Mental Health Institute in Bolivar, said plans were for Mrs. Walden to be released to a boarding house. He said she has been in a community preparation unit for nine months and that the religious leaders had nothing to do with her release date.

"She's not locked up and she's not hidden," Cohen said.